To designate Regional Ocean Partnerships of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

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introduced the following bill; which was read twice
and referred to the Committee on

A BILL

To designate Regional Ocean Partnerships of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and for other purposes.

1   Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
2   tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
3   SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.
4   This Act may be cited as the “Regional Ocean Part-
5   nership Act”.
6   SEC. 2. FINDINGS; SENSE OF CONGRESS; PURPOSES.
7   (a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following find-
8      ings:
9   (1) The ocean and coastal waters of the United
10    States are foundational to the economy, security,
global competitiveness, and well-being of the United States and continuously serve the people of the United States and other countries as an important source of food, energy, economic productivity, recreation, beauty, and enjoyment.

(2) Over many years, the resource productivity and water quality of the ocean and coastal areas of the United States have been diminished by pollution, increasing population demands, economic development, and natural and man-made hazard events, both acute and chronic.

(3) Ocean and coastal areas of the United States are managed by State and Federal resource agencies and regulated on an interstate and regional scale by various overlapping Federal authorities, thereby creating a significant need for interstate coordination to enhance regional priorities, including the ecological and economic health of those areas.

(4) Tribal governments have unique expertise and knowledge important for the stewardship of the ocean and coastal waters of the United States.

(b) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that—

(1) the United States should seek to support interstate coordination of shared regional priorities
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relating to the management, conservation, resilience,
and restoration of ocean and coastal areas to maxi-
mize efficiencies through collaborative regional ef-
forts by Regional Ocean Partnerships, in consulta-
tion with Federal and State agencies, Tribal govern-
ments, and local authorities;

(2) such efforts would enhance existing and ef-
fектив State coastal management efforts based on
shared regional priorities; and

(3) Regional Ocean Partnerships should consult
with Tribal governments and may include represen-
tation from Tribal governments.

(c) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this Act are as fol-
lows:

(1) To complement and expand cooperative vol-
untary efforts intended to manage and restore ocean
and coastal areas spanning across multiple State
boundaries.

(2) To expand Federal support for monitoring,
data management, and restoration activities in ocean
and coastal areas.

(3) To commit the United States to a com-
prehensive cooperative program to achieve improved
water quality in, and improvements in the produc-
tivity of living resources of, all coastal ecosystems.
(4) To authorize Regional Ocean Partnerships as intergovernmental coordinators for shared inter-state and regional priorities relating to the collaborative management of the large marine ecosystems, thereby reducing duplication of efforts and maximizing opportunities to leverage support in the ocean and coastal regions.

(5) To empower States to take a lead role in managing oceans and coasts.

(6) To incorporate Tribal interests in the management of oceans and coasts and provide funding to support Tribal ocean and coastal resiliency activities in coordination with Regional Ocean Partnerships.

(7) To enable Regional Ocean Partnerships, or designated fiscal management entities of such partnerships, to receive Federal funding to conduct the scientific research, conservation and restoration activities, and priority coordination on shared regional priorities necessary to achieve the purposes described in paragraphs (1) through (6).

SEC. 3. REGIONAL OCEAN PARTNERSHIPS.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:
(1) **ADMINISTRATOR.**—The term “Administrator” means the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

(2) **COASTAL STATE.**—The term “coastal state” has the meaning given that term in section 304 of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1453).

(3) **INDIAN TRIBE.**—The term “Indian Tribe” has the meaning given that term in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304).

(4) **INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.**—The term “institution of higher education” has the meaning given that term in section 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

(b) **REGIONAL OCEAN PARTNERSHIPS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—A coastal state may participate in a Regional Ocean Partnership with one or more other coastal states that share a common ocean or coastal area with the coastal state, without regard to whether the coastal states are contiguous.

(2) **APPLICATION.**—The Governor of a coastal state or the Governors of a group of coastal states may apply to the Secretary of Commerce, on behalf of a partnership, for the partnership to receive des-
ignation as a Regional Ocean Partnership if the partnership—

(A) meets the requirements under paragraph (3); and

(B) submits an application for such designation in such manner, in such form, and containing such information as the Secretary may require.

(3) REQUIREMENTS.—A partnership is eligible for designation as a Regional Ocean Partnership by the Secretary under paragraph (2) if the partnership—

(A) is established to coordinate the interstate management of ocean and coastal resources;

(B) focuses on the environmental issues affecting the ocean and coastal areas of the members participating in the partnership;

(C) complements existing State coastal and ocean management efforts on an interstate scale, focusing on shared regional priorities;

(D) does not have a regulatory function; and
(E) is not duplicative of an existing Regional Ocean Partnership designated under paragraph (4), as determined by the Secretary.

(4) DESIGNATION OF CERTAIN ENTITIES AS REGIONAL OCEAN PARTNERSHIPS.—Notwithstanding paragraph (2) or (3), the following entities are designated as Regional Ocean Partnerships:

(A) The Gulf of Mexico Alliance, comprised of the States of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

(B) The Northeast Regional Ocean Council, comprised of the States of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.

(C) The Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, comprised of the States of New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia.

(D) The West Coast Ocean Alliance, comprised of the States of California, Oregon, and Washington and the coastal Indian Tribes therein.

(e) GOVERNING BODIES OF REGIONAL OCEAN PARTNERSHIPS.
(1) IN GENERAL.—A Regional Ocean Partnership designated under subsection (b) shall be governed by a governing body.

(2) MEMBERSHIP.—A governing body described in paragraph (1)—

(A) shall be comprised, at a minimum, of voting members from each coastal state participating in the Regional Ocean Partnership, designated by the Governor of the coastal state; and

(B) may include such other members as the partnership considers appropriate.

(d) FUNCTIONS.—A Regional Ocean Partnership designated under subsection (b) may perform the following functions:

(1) Promote coordination of the actions of the agencies of coastal states participating in the partnership with the actions of the appropriate officials of Federal agencies and State and Tribal governments in developing strategies—

(A) to conserve living resources, increase valuable habitats, enhance coastal resilience and ocean management, promote ecological and economic health, and address such other issues related to the shared ocean or coastal area as are
determined to be a shared, regional priority by
those states; and

(B) to manage regional data portals and
develop associated data products for purposes
that support the priorities of the partnership.

(2) In cooperation with appropriate Federal and
State agencies, Tribal governments, and local au-
thorities, develop and implement specific action
plans to carry out coordination goals.

(3) Coordinate and implement priority plans
and projects, and facilitate science, research, mod-
eling, monitoring, data collection, and other activi-
ties that support the goals of the partnership
through the provision of grants and contracts under
subsection (f).

(4) Engage, coordinate, and collaborate with
relevant governmental entities and stakeholders to
address ocean and coastal related matters that re-
quire interagency or intergovernmental solutions.

(5) Implement outreach programs for public in-
formation, education, and participation to foster
stewardship of the resources of the ocean and coast-
al areas, as relevant.

(6) Develop and make available, through publi-
cations, technical assistance, and other appropriate
means, information pertaining to cross-jurisdictional
issues being addressed through the coordinated ac-
tivities of the partnership.

(7) Serve as a liaison with, and provide infor-
mation to, international counterparts, as appropriate
on priority issues for the partnership.

(e) CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT.—A Regional
Ocean Partnership designated under subsection (b) shall
maintain mechanisms for consultation and engagement
with the following:

(1) The Federal Government.

(2) Tribal governments.

(3) Nongovernmental entities, including aca-
demic organizations, nonprofit organizations, and
businesses.

(f) GRANTS AND CONTRACTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—A Regional Ocean Partner-
ship designated under subsection (b) may, in coordi-
nation with existing Federal and State management
programs, from amounts made available to the part-
nership by the Administrator or the head of another
Federal agency provide grants and enter into con-
tracts for the purposes described in paragraph (2).

(2) PURPOSES.—The purposes described in this
paragraph include any of the following:
(A) Monitoring the water quality and living resources of multi-State ocean and coastal ecosystems and coastal communities.

(B) Researching and addressing the effects of natural and human-induced environmental changes on—

(i) ocean and coastal ecosystems; and

(ii) coastal communities.

(C) Developing and executing cooperative strategies that—

(i) address regional data issues identified by the partnership; and

(ii) will result in more effective management of common ocean and coastal areas.

(g) REPORT REQUIRED.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 5 years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator, in coordination with the Regional Ocean Partnerships designated under subsection (b), shall submit to Congress a report on the partnerships.

(2) REPORT REQUIREMENTS.—The report required by paragraph (1) shall include the following:
(A) An assessment of the overall status of 
the work of the Regional Ocean Partnerships 
designated under subsection (b).

(B) An assessment of the effectiveness of 
the partnerships in supporting regional prior-
ities relating to the management of common 
ocean and coastal areas.

(C) An identification of any duplication of 
efforts between the partnerships and other enti-
ties.

(D) An assessment of the benefits and 
costs of the partnerships.

(E) An assessment of the effectiveness of 
the strategies that the partnerships are sup-
porting or implementing and the extent to 
which the priority needs of the regions covered 
by the partnerships are being met through such 
strategies.

(F) An assessment of how the efforts of 
the partnerships support or enhance Federal 
and State efforts consistent with the purposes 
of this Act.

(G) Such recommendations as the Admin- 
istrator may have for improving—
(i) efforts of the partnerships to support the purposes of this Act; and

(ii) collective strategies that support the purposes of this Act in coordination and consultation with all relevant Federal, State, and Tribal entities.

(H) The distribution of funds from each partnership for each fiscal year covered by the report.

(h) **AVAILABILITY OF FEDERAL FUNDS.**—In addition to amounts made available to the Regional Ocean Partnerships designated under subsection (b) by the Administrator under this section, the head of any other Federal agency may provide grants to, enter into contracts with, or otherwise provide funding to such partnerships.

(i) **AUTHORITIES.**—Nothing in this section establishes any new legal or regulatory authority of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or of the Regional Ocean Partnerships designated under subsection (b), other than—

(1) the authority of the Administrator to provide amounts to the partnerships; and

(2) the authority of the partnerships to provide grants and enter into contracts under subsection (f).

(j) **FUNDING.**—
(1) **REGIONAL OCEAN PARTNERSHIPS.**—There are authorized to be appropriated to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration the following amounts to be made available to the Regional Ocean Partnerships designated under subsection (b) or designated fiscal management entities of such partnerships to carry out activities of the partnerships under this Act:

(A) $10,100,000 for fiscal year 2022.

(B) $10,202,000 for fiscal year 2023.

(C) $10,306,040 for fiscal year 2024.

(D) $10,412,160 for fiscal year 2025.

(E) $10,520,404 for fiscal year 2026.

(2) **DISTRIBUTION OF AMOUNTS.**—Amounts made available under paragraph (1) shall be divided evenly among the Regional Ocean Partnerships designated under subsection (b).

(3) **TRIBAL CONSULTATION.**—There is authorized to be appropriated to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration $1,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2022 through 2026 for Indian Tribes to be distributed for purposes of participation in or engagement with the Regional Ocean Partnerships.

(4) **DERIVATION.**—Funds to carry out the activities under this Act shall be derived from amounts
authorized to be appropriated pursuant to paragraphs (1) and (3) that are appropriated after the date of the enactment of this Act.